

Malaysia, Singapore & Brunei

Brunei (Chapter)

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Pages 19

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Coverage includes: Bandar Seri Begawan, Tutong, Jalan Labi, Seria, Kuala Belait, Temburong District, Bangar, Pulau Selirong, Batang Duri, Peradayan Forest Reserve and Ulu Temburong National Park.

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Brunei

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Includes »

Bandar Seri Begawan...	456
Tutong & Belait	
Districts	467
Tutong	467
Jalan Labi.....	467
Seria	467
Kuala Belait.....	468
Temburong District	468
Bangar.....	468
Pulau Selirong	470
Batang Duri.....	470
Peradayan Forest Reserve	470
Ulu Temburong National Park.....	470

Best Places to Eat

- » Taman Selera (p463)
- » Lim Ah Siaw Pork Market (p462)
- » Pondok Sari Wangi (p462)

Best Places to Stay

- » Ulu-Ulu Resort (p472)
- » Brunei Hotel (p461)
- » Pusat Belia (p461)

Why Go?

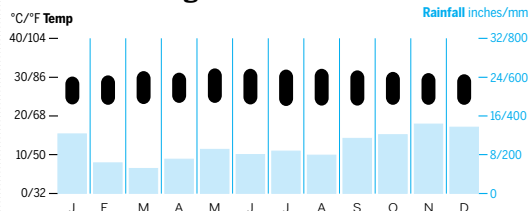
The small sultanate of Brunei almost looks like a geographic comma plunked between Sarawak and Sabah. It certainly forms a conceptual one, because unless you're a petroleum engineer, when folks ask 'Why go to Brunei?' the answer is usually the travelling equivalent of a pause: transfer or stopover.

But there's more here than passport queues. This quiet *darussalam* (Arabic for 'abode of peace') has the largest oilfields in Southeast Asia, and because oil generates money, Brunei hasn't turned its rainforests into palm plantations. Old-growth greenery abounds, especially in verdant Ulu Temburong National Park. Because booze is banned, the citizens of the capital, Bandar Seri Begawan (BSB), are mad for food and shopping.

This tranquil (sometimes somnolent) nation is the realisation of a particular vision: a strict, socially controlled religious state where happiness is found in pious worship and mass consumption. Visit and judge the results for yourself.

When to Go

Bandar Seri Begawan



Oct–Dec The rainiest, if coolest, months of the year.

Jan–May February and March are the driest months. National Day is celebrated on 23 February.

Jun–Aug It's hot. The sultan's birthday (15 July) is marked with festivities around the country.

SOUTH CHINA SEA

To Pulau Labuan (35km);
Menumbok, Sabah (45km)



Brunei Highlights

- 1 Climbing high into the rainforest canopy and swimming in a cool jungle river at **Ulu Temburong National Park** (p470)
- 2 Tearing along mangrove-lined waterways on a **speedboat** (p00) from BSB to Bangar
- 3 Taking a water taxi to the water village of **Kampung**

- Ayer** (p456) and then indulging in a boardwalk stroll
- 4 Walking along BSB's newly refurbished **waterfront promenade** (p456)
- 5 Visiting BSB's opulent **mosques** (p456)
- 6 Marvelling at the **Empire Hotel & Country Club** (p461),

- a sparkling monument to world-class profligacy
- 7 Relaxing amid rural greenery at **Sumbiling Eco Village** (p470) in Temburong District
- 8 Gorging yourself on the culinary delights of the many restaurants of **BSB** (p462)

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN

POP 100,000

Cities built on oil money tend to be flashy places, but with the exception of a palace you usually can't enter, a couple of enormous mosques and one wedding cake of a hotel, Bandar (as the capital is known, or just BSB) is a pretty understated place. Urban life pretty much revolves around malls, restaurants and, depending on your level of piety, illicit parties or Islam (and sometimes both). BSB does have a few museums and the biggest water village in the world, a little slice of vintage that speaks to the Bruneian love of cosiness and nostalgia.

BSB's city centre is on the north bank of Sungai Brunei at a spot – 12km upriver from Brunei Bay – that's easy to defend against seaborne attack and sheltered from both storms and tsunamis. During the Japanese occupation, the city centre – known until 1970 as Brunei Town – was severely damaged by Allied bombing.

Sights & Activities

All of central BSB is within easy walking or sailing distance of the Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque, but unless you don't mind walking for hours in the tropical sun, you'll have to make do with buses and taxis to get to sights east, north and west of downtown. Many malls and restaurants are in Gadong, located about 5km northwest of central BSB. There is a pleasant **promenade** along Jln McArthur, at the foot of Jln Sultan facing Kampung Ayer, which is a nice spot for an evening stroll.

CENTRAL BSB

Kampung Ayer

WATER VILLAGES

(Map p458) Home to an estimated 20,000 people, Kampung Ayer consists of 28 contiguous stilt villages – named after the crafts and occupations traditionally practiced there – built along both (but especially the southern) banks of Sungai Brunei. A century ago, half of Brunei's population lived here, and even today many Bruneians – despite government inducements – still prefer the lifestyle of the water village to residency on dry land. If you look to the main roads on the opposite banks of the village you'll see luxury cars lined up on the shoulder of the road; many of these cars belong to water village residents. That said, Kampung Ayer is also home to a sizable population of undocumented immigrants that constitute Brunei's underclass.

Founded at least a thousand years ago, the village is considered the largest stilt settlement in the world and has its own schools, mosques, police stations and fire brigade. The houses, painted sun-bleached shades of green, blue, pink and yellow, have not been cutesified for tourists, so while it's far from squalid, be prepared for trash that, at low tide, carpets the intertidal mud under the banisterless boardwalks, some with missing planks. When Venetian scholar Antonio Pigafetta, who accompanied Ferdinand Magellan on his last voyage, visited Kampung Ayer in 1521, he dubbed it the 'Venice of the East', which is, as descriptions go, a bit ambitious.

A good place to start a visit – and get acquainted with Brunei's pre-oil culture – is the **Kampung Ayer Cultural & Tourism Gallery** (Map p458; ☎9am-5pm Sat-Thu, 9-11.30am & 2.30-5pm Fri), directly across the river from Sungai Kianggeh (the stream at the eastern edge of the city centre). Opened in 2009, this riverfront complex focuses on the history, lifestyle and crafts of the Kampung Ayer people and usually has a live handicrafts demonstration. Like many of the sultanate's public institutions, this one is overstaffed, yet somehow seems underserved, leading to lots of people who spend much of their time just standing around. A square, glass-enclosed **viewing tower** offers panoramic views of the scene below.

Getting across the river from the city centre (ie the area next to and east of the Yayasan Complex) or the eastern bank of Sungai Kianggeh is a breeze. Just stand somewhere a water taxi – BSB's souped-up version of the gondola – can dock and flag an empty one down.

To visit the villages on the river's **north bank** (the same side as the city centre), follow the plankwalks that head southwest from Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque, or those leading west (parallel to the river) from the Yayasan Complex, itself built on the site of a one-time water village.

Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque

MOSQUE

(Map p458; Jln Stoney; ☎interior 8.30am-noon, 1.30-3pm & 4.30-5.30pm Sat-Wed, 4.30-5pm Fri, closed Thu, exterior compound 8am-8.30pm daily except prayer times) Built from 1954 to 1958, Masjid Omar Ali Saifuddin – named after the 28th sultan of Brunei (the late father of the current sultan) – is surrounded by an artificial lagoon that serves as a reflecting pool. The mosque is basically the happening



RAMADAN ROAD RULES

Brunei is an extremely religious, majority-Muslim nation that takes Ramadan seriously. If you're visiting during the holiest month of the Islamic year, keep in mind that by around 3pm, most people – especially drivers – are tired or stressed or both thanks to the daily fast. It's a documented fact that many car accidents occur at this time, and it's an anecdotal observation that normally polite Bruneians can get downright testy around this time. Just be mindful when interacting with locals and careful if you're out on the roads during late afternoon at this time.

centre of city life in Bandar come evenings; folks come for prayer, then leave to eat or shop, which is sort of Brunei in a nutshell. The 44m minaret makes it the tallest building in central BSB, and woe betide anyone who tries to outdo it – apparently the nearby Islamic Bank of Brunei building originally exceeded this height and so had its top storey removed by order of the sultan.

This being Brunei, the interior is pretty lavish. The floor and walls are made from the finest Italian marble, the stained-glass windows and chandeliers were crafted in England, and the luxurious carpets were flown in from Saudi Arabia and Belgium. Jigsaw enthusiasts can admire the 3.5-million-piece Venetian mosaic inside the main dome.

The ceremonial stone boat sitting in the lagoon is a replica of a 16th-century *mahligai* (royal barge).

FREE Royal Regalia Museum

MUSEUM

(Map p458; Jln Sultan; ☎9am-5pm Sun-Thu, 9-11.30am & 2.30-5pm Fri, 9.45am-5pm Sat, last entry 4.30pm) When called upon to present a gift to the sultan of Brunei, you must inevitably confront the question: what do you give a man who has everything? Here you'll see how various heads of state and royalty have solved this conundrum (hint: you'll never go wrong with priceless gold and jewels). We particularly like the mother of all beer mugs, given by Queen Elizabeth II.

Water-Taxi Cruise

BOAT TOUR

The best way to see BSB's water villages and the sultan's fabled palace, Istana Nurul

Iman, is from a water taxi, which can be chartered along the waterfront for about B\$30 to B\$40 (a bit of negotiating will occur, but at least you know the locals can't claim the petrol is expensive!). Finding a boat won't be a problem, as the boatmen will have spotted you before you spot them.

After you admire the palace's backyard, your boatman can take you further upriver to **Pulau Rangu**, an island that's home to a large colony of proboscis monkeys. The best time to head out is late afternoon, as the monkeys are easiest to spot around sunset.

EAST OF CENTRAL BSB

Brunei Museum

MUSEUM

(☎224 4545; Jln Kota Batu; ☎9am-5pm Sat-Thu, 9-11.30am & 2.30-5pm Fri, last entry 30 min before closing; ☐) Brunei's national museum, officially opened by Queen Elizabeth II in 1972, is a decent place to blow an hour of your time. It definitely feels a little dated.

The oldest pieces are in the newest, most well-kept section of the museum: the **Islamic Art Gallery**, which displays ceramics from Iran and Central Asia and blown glass from Egypt and the Levant dating from the 9th and 10th centuries. Other highlights include illuminated manuscripts of the Koran, tiny Korans the size of a matchbox and gold jewellery.

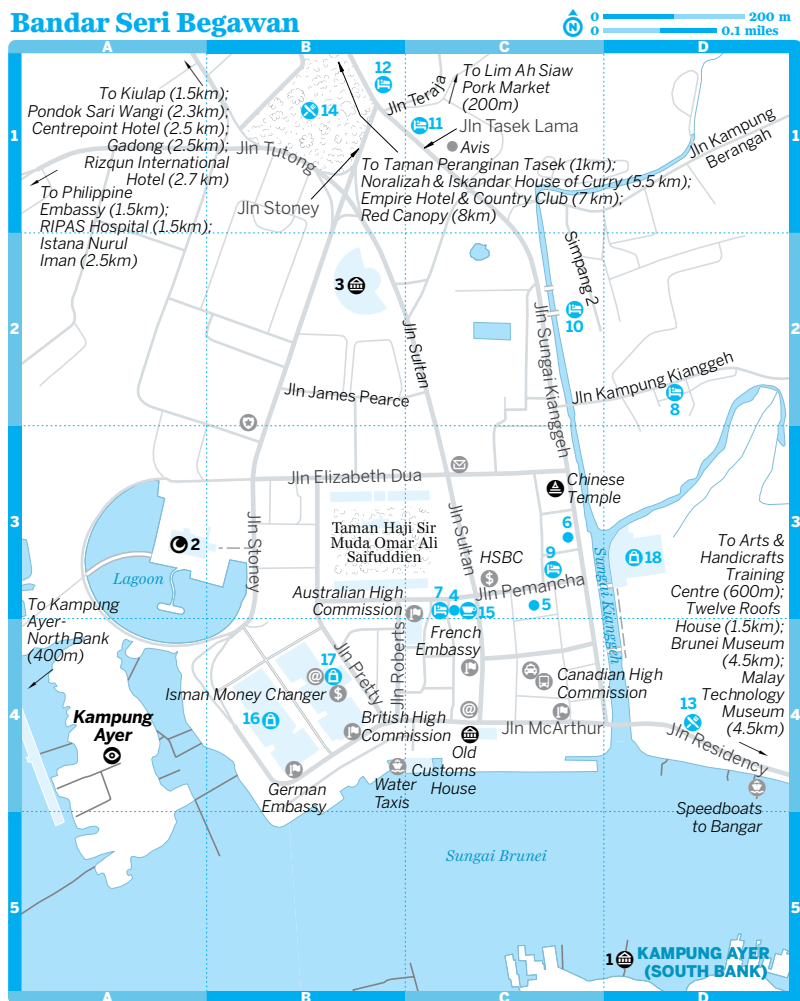
The **Brunei Traditional Culture Gallery** spotlights Brunei's role in Southeast Asia's history, cultures and commerce, and has a section on Western trade and intervention in Brunei, starting with the arrival of the Spanish and Portuguese in the 1500s. There's some frankly creepy, life-sized depictions of Malay rituals like weddings, child-rearing and (ouch) circumcision, and a collection of Brunei's famous ceremonial cannons, known as *bedil*, some with barrels shaped like dragon heads.

The **Natural History Gallery** is a decent introduction to Borneo's extraordinary biodiversity. Quite a few of the stuffed animals look to be on their last, moulding legs.

At the time of our visit there was an entire **wing** devoted to oil and gas extraction, the technology behind it, the good it has done for Brunei and an extensive exhibit on the kingdom's long-term plan for its economy after the oil runs out. Just kidding about that last bit.

The Brunei Museum is 4.5km east of central BSB along the coastal road, on a bluff overlooking Sungai Brunei. To get here, take the Central Bus line or a taxi (around B\$10 from the bus station).

Bandar Seri Begawan



Malay Technology Museum

MUSEUM

(Jln Kota Batu; ☎9am-5pm Sun-Thu, 9-11.30am & 2.30-5pm Fri, 9.45am-5pm Sat, last entry 30 min before closing) Linked to the Brunei Museum by a short path down the hill, this museum has somewhat outdated displays on life in a Malay water village (stilt architecture, boat making, fishing techniques, handicrafts) and a Murut (Lun Bawang) longhouse.

Twelve Roofs House

MUSEUM

(Bubungan Dua Belas; ☎224 4545; Jln Residency; ☎9am-4.30pm Mon-Thu, 2.30am-4.30pm Fri, Sat 9am-11.30am; P) The one-time residence

of Britain's colonial-era high commissioner, said to be the sultanate's oldest extant building, is now a museum dedicated to the longstanding 'special relationship' between Brunei and the UK. The evocative photos include views of Brunei as it looked a century ago and many fine shots of Queen Elizabeth II. The swimming pool out the back is rumoured to be haunted – during WWII the Japanese executed people there. It was unaccountably closed when we visited, so you may want to call ahead.

The building is 1.5km southeast of Sungai Kianggeh, towards the Brunei Museum, on

Bandar Seri Begawan

📍 Top Sights

- Kampung Ayer A4

📍 Sights

- 1 Kampung Ayer Cultural & Tourism Gallery D5
2 Omar Ali Saifuddin Mosque A3
3 Royal Regalia Museum B2

📍 Activities, Courses & Tours

- 4 Borneo Guide C3
5 Frema Travel Services C3
6 Intrepid Tours C3
Mona Flora fauna Tours (see 9)

📍 Sleeping

- 7 Brunei Hotel C3
8 Jubilee Hotel D2

- 9 KH Soon Resthouse C3
10 Pusat Belia C2
11 Radisson Hotel C1
12 Terrace Hotel B1

🍴 Eating

- 13 Gerai Makan Jalan Residency D4
14 Taman Selera B1
Tamu Kianggeh (see 18)

🍷 Drinking

- 15 Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf C3

🛍 Shopping

- 16 Hua Ho Department Store B4
17 Paul & Elizabeth Book Services B4
18 Tamu Kianggeh D3

a hilltop dominating the river. To get here from the city centre, take the Central Bus line, a taxi or a water taxi.

NORTH & WEST OF CENTRAL BSB

Jame'Asr Hassanil

Bolkiah Mosque

MOSQUE

(Sultan Hassanil Bolkiah Hwy, Kampung Kiarong; ☀8am-noon, 2-3pm & 5-6pm Mon-Wed & Sat, 5-6pm Fri, 10.30am-noon, 2-3pm & 5-6pm Sun, closed Thu; 📍) Built in 1992 to celebrate the 25th year of the current sultan's reign, Brunei's largest mosque and its four terrazzo-tiled minarets dominate the 'suburbs' of BSB. It's certainly a noticeable building; because the sultan is his dynasty's 29th ruler, the complex is adorned with 29 golden domes. At night the mosque is lit up like a gold flame.

The interior is best described as jaw-droppingly over-the-top. The sheer volume in itself is amazing, not to mention the myriad woven rugs scattered across the men's prayer hall.

The mosque is about 3km northwest of the city centre towards Gadong. To get here, take buses 1 or 22 from the main bus terminal.

Istana Nurul Iman

PALACE

(Jln Tutong) If you drink too much water before visiting Istana Nurul Iman (Palace of the Light of the Faith), the official residence of the sultan, never fear: the palace has 257 bathrooms. The 200,000-sq-m behemoth

boasts 1531 more rooms (that's 1788 in total) and is one of the largest habitations of any sort in the world – more than four times the size of the Palace of Versailles and three times larger than Buckingham Palace.

Designed by Filipino architect Leandro Locsin, the palace – 3km southwest of the centre of town – mixes Malay and Islamic elements with the sweep and oversized grandeur of an airport terminal. Nonetheless, it's relatively attractive from a distance or when illuminated in the evening.

Istana Nurul Iman is open to the public only during the three-day Hari Raya Aidil Fitri festivities at the end of Ramadan. The best way to check it out the other 362 days of the year, is to take a water-taxi cruise or to stop by the riverside pavilion at **Taman Perisiran Damuan**, a landscaped park 1.2km beyond the palace (when travelling from the city centre).

Taman Peranginan Tasek

PARK

(Tasek Recreational Park; Jln Tasek Lama; 📍) BSB's tinier, dustier version of Central Park has greenery, picnic areas and peaceful walks to a small waterfall and a large reservoir. Locals come here to do t'ai chi (6am to 9am), jog (in the evening), use the exercise apparatus and admire the view. It's situated about 2km north of the city centre; to walk here turn east 400m north of the Terrace Hotel in the north of the city centre, otherwise catch a Northern Line bus.

JERUDONG

Jerudong Park Playground AMUSEMENT PARK (Jerudong; admission free, under 5/over 5 rides B\$8/10; ☀4-10.30pm Wed, Thu & Sun, 2-10pm Fri & Sat, closed Mon & Tue except during school holidays) In its heyday, this B\$1 billion amusement park, a Prince Jefri project opened in 1994, was the pride of Brunei, and the only major modern amusement park in Southeast Asia. The concert hall hosted free shows by the likes of Whitney Houston and Michael Jackson, the latter to celebrate the sultan's 50th birthday, and the many rides included a giant roller coaster.

That attraction, along with most of the others, was sold off to repay debts, and today Jerudong is mostly a depressing lesson in hubris and economics: don't build something people don't want. Ostensibly 10 rides, including a merry-go-round and junior bumper cars, still operate. In our experience, this is not a sound assumption to make, so ask the person in front if any rides work before you buy a ride ticket. The park seems pretty busy on weekends, which is probably the best time to visit. The rumour is some party out there wants to convert the park into a smaller children's play area with basic rides and attractions, which sounds like a lovely idea.

There is no bus service to the park, which is near the coast about 20km northwest of BSB, so the only way to get here is by taxi (about B\$35 from the centre) or private car.

MUARA'S BEACHES

Pantai Muara (Muara Beach), near the tip of the peninsula, is a popular weekend retreat. It's pretty, but like many beaches in Borneo it's littered with driftwood and other flotsam that comes in with the tide. Quiet during the week, it has food stalls, picnic tables and a children's playground.

About 4km west of Muara along the Muara-Tutong Hwy, **Pantai Meragang** (Crocodile Beach) is another stretch of pleasant seaside sand that's not quite as crowded as the others on weekends. There are a couple of food stalls that make this a good place for a picnic. We've never heard of crocodiles here, by the way.

The beaches are about 25km northeast of BSB around the cargo, ferry and naval port of Muara, the site of an Australian amphibious landing in April 1945. Muara's town centre is served by buses 37, 38 and 39 (B\$1) from BSB city centre; bus 33 will take you from Muara town to Pantai Muara. Pantai Meragang is difficult to get to without your own transport.

Tours

A number of local agencies offer tours of BSB and trips to nature sites around the sultanate, including Ulu Temburong National Park and the mangroves of Pulau Selirong, 45 minutes by boat from the city. Some also offer night safaris where you can spot proboscis monkeys, crocs and fireflies.

Borneo Guide

TOUR

(Map p458; ☎718 7138, 876 6796, 242 6923; www.borneoguide.com; Unit 204, Kiaw Lian Building, Jln Pemancha; ☀9am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) Excellent service, good prices and a variety of eco-programs around Brunei and Borneo. A day trip to Ulu Temburong National Park costs B\$120 from BSB (7.30am to 4.30pm or 5pm). Two days and one night at the park, including food and activities, costs B\$245 from BSB. The office also serves as a useful tourism information centre.

Intrepid Tours

TOURS

(Map p458; ☎222 1685, 222 1686; www.bruneibay.net/intrepidtours/index.html; 1st fl (Unit 105), PGGMB Building, Jln Sungai Kianggeh) Has its

BLASTED, BLASTING BEDIL

One of the more interesting exhibits in the **Brunei Museum** – partly because it's one of the few pieces of displayed culture that is native solely to Brunei, as opposed to the surrounding Malay culturesphere – is a series of *bedil*, or cannons. It was not oil but these bronze-cast weapons that were once the source of the sultanate's wealth and power. The cannons of Brunei subjugated many of the smaller kingdoms of Borneo and extended the sultanate's power all the way to the Philippines. They were so common they became an expected dowry gift; perhaps rightly so – *bedil* are beautiful. All are decorated in a baroque fashion, and some are carved to resemble dragons and crocodiles, because let's face it: what's more terrifying than a cannon ball erupting from a crocodile's mouth?

MONKEY BUSINESS

Long-tailed macaques and their adorable offspring often frolic in the trees along the road that heads up the hill (towards the radio tower) from the intersection between the Terrace and Radisson Hotels – listen for the tell-tale rustle of branches as they prance from tree to tree. As ever, don't approach the monkeys, no matter how beguiling they are. The primates are somewhere nearby all day long – sneaking into someone's kitchen through an open window, perhaps – but are easiest to spot very early in the morning, in the late afternoon and around dusk.

own lodge near Batang Duri (on the way to Ulu Temburong National Park). Main office located about 9km northeast of central BSB.

Mona Florafauna Tours OUTDOORS, TOUR
(Map p458; ☎24hr 884 9110; jungle-dave.blogspot.com.au; 209 1st fl, Kiaw Lian Bldg, 140 Jln Peman-
cha; ☉8.30am-5pm) Specialises in outdoor
and wildlife tours, with friendly and person-
able service. Email or call in advance.

Freme Travel Services TOUR
(Map p458; ☎223 4277; www.freme.com; 4th fl, of-
fice 4.03B, Wisma Jaya, Jln Peman-cha) A bit cor-
porate, but has plenty of options, as befits
one of Brunei's largest travel agencies.

Sleeping

Budget options are thin on the ground. Up-
scale places often offer big discounts online.



Brunei Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p458; ☎224 4828; thebruneihotel.com; 95 Jln
Peman-cha; incl breakfast r B\$91-220, ste B\$242-
440; ☉@☉) The best bang for your Brunei
dollar in town, the Brunei is...hip. OK, it's
not the W or anything, but there are clean
lines, monochromatic colour schemes, geo-
metric patterns and a general sense of ul-
tramodern cool, which is pretty unexpected
in the sultanate. There's a decent breakfast
buffet thrown into the deal served in the
downstairs **Choices Cafe**, and the staff are
friendly, helpful, competent and eager; the
latter quality was frankly unexpected and
greatly appreciated.

Pusat Belia

HOSTEL \$

(Youth Centre; Map p458; ☎887 3066, 222 2900;
Jln Sungai Kianggeh; dm B\$10; ☉☉) Gets rave
reviews from backpackers despite the fact
that couples can't stay together. The 28 spa-
cious, strictly sex-segregated rooms, with
four or 10 beds (all bunks), have functional
furnishings, big windows, red cement floors
and passable bathrooms. Situated at the

southern end of the Youth Centre complex
(behind the cylindrical staircase). Recep-
tion is supposed to be open from 7.45am to
4.30pm Monday to Thursday, and on call til
10pm otherwise, but staffing can be inter-
mittent. If the office is locked, hang around
and someone should find you. The adjacent
swimming pool costs B\$1. May fill up with
government guests on holidays and for
sports events.

Terrace Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p458; ☎224 3554, 224 3555, 224 3556, 224
3557; www.terracebrunei.com; Jln Tasek Lama; d
B\$65-75; ☉@☉☉) A classic tourist-class ho-
tel whose 84 rooms are dowdy (think 1980s)
but clean, and come with marble bathrooms.
It also has a great little swimming pool. In a
good location just 800m north of the water-
front, near a hawkers centre.

Empire Hotel & Country Club

RESORT \$\$\$

(☎241 8888; www.theempirehotel.com; Muara-
Tutong Hwy, Kampung Jerudong; r incl breakfast
from B\$400, villas B\$1300-2900; ☉@☉☉) Pharaonic (or perhaps Dubaian) in its
proportions and opulence, this 523-room
extravaganza was commissioned by Prince
Jefri as lodging for guests of the royal fam-
ily. To recoup some of the US\$1.1 billion
investment, the property was quickly trans-
formed into an upscale resort. So what's it
like inside? To paraphrase Dolly Parton, it
takes a lot of money to look this cheap. Sor-
ry, we're just not ones for yards of marble
and column-ed everything. Anyways, now
anyone with a thing for Las Vegas-style
bling can hang out in the lobby and enjoy
one of the US\$500,000 lamps made of gold
and Baccarat crystal (the other one in the
Emperor Suite can be appreciated privately
for around B\$17,000 per night). Even the
cheapest rooms (except the recently opened
Ocean rooms) have remote-control eve-
rything, hand-woven carpets, gold-plated
power points and enormous bathrooms

with marble floors, but the decor still somehow feels stodgy and unimaginative. But hey, worth a visit for the gilded spectacle; tea in the Lobby Lounge costs a mere B\$5 a pot and the enormous pool complex outside is popular with expats and the wealthy. To get here, take bus 57 from the city centre or Gadong (runs two or three times a day; on the way back, book at the Transport desk), or a taxi (B\$30 to B\$35).

Radisson Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p458; ☎224 4272; www.radisson.com/brunei; Jln Tasek Lama; r from B\$170; ㊟㊟㊟) This Radisson chain hotel, plopped on the edge of the town centre, flies the flag for international standards. The sparkling lobby exudes comfort and wealth, as do the business-class rooms. Amenities include two pools (one for kids), a fitness centre, a spa and two restaurants. Free shuttle service to Gadong and downtown three times a day.

Jubilee Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p458; ☎222 8070; www.jubileehotelbrunei.com; Jln Kampung Kianggeh; d B\$70-95, f B\$145; ㊟㊟) The Jubilee's rooms aren't flash – they may remind you of your old aunt's seldom-used guest bedroom – but are liveable and clean. 'Superior' rooms come with kitchenettes.

Centrepoin Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎243 0430; www.thecentrepointhotel.com; Abdul Razak Complex; r B\$280-380, ste from B\$550; ㊟㊟㊟) The Centrepoin is a flash business-class hotel located in trendy Gadong. The rooms are plush and decently luxurious in an executive kind of way. To get to Gadong, either hop in a taxi or you can take the Circle Line bus.

KH Soon Resthouse

GUESTHOUSE \$

(Map p458; ☎222 2052; khsoon-resthouse.tripod.com; 2nd fl, 140 Jln Pemancha; s/d B\$35/39, with shared bathroom B\$30/35; ㊟) This rather matter-of-fact guesthouse, in a converted commercial space with floors the colour of a man-o-war's decks, offers budget rates, huge but spartan rooms, and a supercentral location. An extra bed costs around B\$17.

Rizqun International Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(☎243 3000; www.rizquninternational.com; Abdul Razak Complex; r from B\$320; ㊟) Another tourist hotel in the Gadong district, the Rizqun is much more sophisticated than you'd expect for something growing out of a shopping mall. Plenty of restaurants, friendly staff and

business-class amenities on hand. To get here, take a taxi or Circle Line bus.

✂ Eating

BSB is not exactly a city that screams sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll – the second part of that equation is illegal, the other two are definitely happening behind closed doors. So how do people have fun? *Makan* (eat). *Makan, makan, makan*. "Food and Instagramming our food is Brunei's national pastime," says Thanis Lim, a food blogger who's website (cookiemonzters.blogspot.com) is the go-to spot for those into the Brunei food scene.

In the city centre, restaurants can be found along the waterfront and on Jln Sultan (south of Jln Pemancha). The big shopping malls, including those out in Gadong, have **food courts** everywhere. Find a spot that looks busy and chow down. All restaurants listed have air-conditioning except outdoor food stalls.

TOP CHOICE Pondok Sari Wangi

INDONESIAN, CHINESE \$\$

(☎244 5403; Block A, No.12-13, Abdul Razak Complex, Jln Gadong; mains B\$5-18; ☎10am-10pm; ㊟) Located in Gadong, Pondok Sari Wangi is a beloved Bandar institution. The cuisine is Indonesian/Chinese, which means lots of gloriously rich, decadent, colourful grub like marinated 'smashed chicken', a fried fish with fiery sambal, sweet sauteed local greens and vegetables, mouth-watering satay with a heavily textured peanut sauce and the signature short ribs, braised to something like perfection. If you want to have some culinary indulgence on your trip, we recommend coming out here and ordering one of everything.

TOP CHOICE Lim Ah Siaw Pork Market

HAWKER \$\$

(☎222 3963; Jln Teraja; mains B\$3.50-9; ☎6:30am-10pm) Lim Ah Siaw has great food, sure. Crispy braised pork knuckle, pork belly, pork buns, pork dumplings; it's seriously *Babe's* hell. More so, because it is actually forbidden to raise pigs in Brunei, Lim Ah Siaw is the closest thing we found in Brunei to a speakeasy. Seriously. You kinda feel like a smuggler sneaking into this Chinese market-turned-restaurant. It also has the atmosphere of a Hong Kong gambling hall, which might take away from the food but certainly spices up the illicit zeitgeist.

Aminah Arif

(📍265 3036; Unit 2-3, Block B, Rahman Bldg, Spg 88, Kiulap; ambuyat for 2 B\$16; ☎9am-10pm; 🍴) Aminah Arif is synonymous with *ambuyat* (thick, starchy porridge), Brunei's signature dish. If you're up for trying a generous serving of wiggly white goo, this is a good spot to do so. Also serves rice and noodle dishes. Meals can be washed down with iced *kasturi ping* (calamansi lime juice; B\$1.80). There are nine branches of Aminah Arif in town, but this one seems the most popular.

Tamu Kianggeh

(Map p458; Jln Sungai Kianggeh; mains from B\$1; ☎5am-5pm) The food stalls here serve Brunei's cheapest meals, including *nasi katok* (plain rice, a piece of fried or curried chicken and sambal; B\$1) and *nasi lemak* (rice cooked in coconut milk and served with chicken, beef or prawn, egg and cucumber slices; also B\$1). In the market's northeast corner, a vegetarian-Chinese stall called **Tamu Chakoi** (stalls 49-51; ☎8.30am-noon, closed Mon; 🍴) serves a variety of inexpensive fried pastries and noodle dishes. We like the stalls for their food; we love them because this is one of the few places in Brunei that feels a little chaotic and messy, which is a little refreshing.

Taman Selera

(Map p458; cnr Jln Tasek Lama & Jln Stoney; mains B\$1-3.50; ☎4pm-midnight) At this old-fashioned hawker centre, set in a shady park, diners eat excellent, cheap Malaysian dishes under colourful tarps and ceiling fans. Options include satay (four skewers for B\$1), fried chicken, seafood, rice and noodle dishes, and iced drinks (B\$1). Situated 1km north of the waterfront, across from the Terrace Hotel.

AMBUYAT \$

HAWKER \$

HAWKER \$

Pasar Malam Gadong

(Jln Pasar Gadong; ☎4-10pm) Thanks to its authentic Brunei-style snacks and dishes, this is Brunei's most popular and beloved night market. Unfortunately, it's geared to car-driving locals who take the food away so there are almost no places to sit. Situated 3km northwest of the city centre and 200m across the river from The Mall shopping centre. Served by buses 1 and 22, but after about 7pm the only way back to town is by taxi (B\$15, more after 8pm).

NIGHT MARKET \$

Noralizah & Iskandar House of Curry

(📍867 5781; Kompleks Awang Hj Ibrahim, Jln Bera-kas; mains B\$3-7; ☎7am-8pm; 🍴) It's all about the roti flatbreads at this spot, from flaky roti to deliciously oily paratha, stuffed with ground lamb and onions in a *murtabak*, or bananas and a dusting of sugar for a breakfast treat. Dip that deliciousness in one of several bowls of warming curry. Very popular with students looking for a cheap meal.

The restaurant is located near the airport. To get here you'll need to take a taxi (\$B8-10 from the city centre) or a bus (Northern Lines 1 and 2 or the Central Line).

INDIAN \$

Kimchi

(📍222 2233; Unit 19, Block B, Regent Sq; B\$3-11; ☎11am-2:30pm & 6pm-10pm) Korean restaurants are pretty ubiquitous in BSB, and Kimchi, in Regent Sq west of the centre, is the best of the bunch. The titular *kimchi* (fermented cabbage) is delightfully smelly and spicy, rice cakes are drowned in a hot, rich sauce and the chicken wings...well, when are chicken wings a bad idea? The *bulgogi* (barbeque) is a lovely indulgence. Take a taxi or bus here (Central Line or the Northern Lines 1 and 2).

KOREAN \$

AMBUYAT – GUMMY, GLUEY & GLUTINOUS

Remember that kid in kindergarten who used to eat paste? Well, *ambuyat*, Brunei's unofficial national dish, comes pretty darn close. It's a gelatinous porridge-like goo made from the ground pith of the sago tree, which is ground to a powder and mixed with water, and eaten with a variety of flavourful sauces.

To eat *ambuyat*, you'll be given a special pair of chopsticks that's attached at the top (don't snap them in two!) to make it easier to twirl up the tenacious mucous. Once you've scooped up a bite-sized quantity, dunk it into the sauce. After your *ambuyat* is sufficiently drenched, place the glob of dripping, quivering, translucent mucilage in your mouth and swallow – don't chew, just let it glide down your throat.

The easiest way to try *ambuyat* is to stop by one of the nine branches of Aminah Arif in BSB.

Gerai Makan Jalan Residency

HAWKER \$

(Jalan Residency Food Court; Map p458; Jln Residency; mains B\$2-5.50; ☎4pm-midnight) Along the riverbank facing Kampung Ayer, this grouping of food stalls features satay (B\$1 for four chicken or three lamb skewers), dozens of kinds of mee goreng and nasi goreng, and soups such as *soto* (noodle soup). The hours we give are not set in stone, and sometimes, some stalls are open 24 hours.

Red Canopy

INTERNATIONAL \$

(☎245 3879; Unit 11 Hassain Complex, Jln Delima; B\$4-9; ☎7am-11pm) Plunked by the airport, the Red Canopy serves up a tasty combination of Malay, Thai, Chinese and Western cuisine (not all at once, obviously). A Malay lunch buffet keeps customers satisfied by day; at night daily specials rotate in and out, from butter-milk chicken on Tuesdays to quail egg soup on Thursdays.

**Drinking**

The sale and public consumption of alcohol is officially banned in Brunei, but locals and expats may know of places (often Chinese restaurants) that discreetly serve beer to regulars, or establishments that let you bring your own.

Locals are fond of *air batu campur* ('ice mix'), usually called ABC, which brings together ice, little green noodles, grass jelly, sago pearls and red beans.

Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf

CAFE

(Map p458; Mayapuri Bldg, 36 Jln Sultan; ☎8am-midnight Sun-Wed, to 1.30am Thu-Sat; ☎) The hangout of choice for folks who need to bang out some work on their laptops or just relax in air-conditioned fridgidity. Serves hot and 'ice blended' beverages, hearty breakfasts, pastries (muffins, cakes, scones), gourmet sandwiches (B\$6 to B\$8) and pasta (B\$4.80 to B\$7.50).

De Royale Café

CAFE

(Mayapuri Bldg, 38 Jln Sultan; ☎24hr; ☎) Organised into two mini living rooms plus side-walk tables, this always-open establishment has a supply of perusable English-language newspapers and serves up pastries, sandwiches (B\$4 to B\$11 – lox is the priciest) and, of course, fresh-brewed coffee. A fine place for a relaxed rendezvous with friends.

**Entertainment**

Locals often head to Gadong for a night out, which in Brunei usually amounts to

nothing more than dinner and perhaps a movie. Based on what you hear, you might conclude that the area is a seething night-life zone or at least a fine collection of smart restaurants. Unfortunately, it's neither – just some air-con shopping malls and commercial streets.

**Shopping**

Shopping is Brunei's national sport. Locals bop through the shopping malls scouting out the best deals while bemoaning the fact that their micro-nation doesn't have as much variety as Singapore.

The country's only traffic jam occurs nightly in Gadong, about 3km northwest of the centre. The area features several air-conditioned bastions of commerce, including two huge malls, Centrepoint and The Mall.

Arts & Handicrafts**Training Centre**

CRAFT

(☎224-0676; Jln Kota Batu; ☎8am-5pm Sat-Thu, 8-11.30am & 2-5pm Fri) Sells silverware, carved wood items, ornamental brass cannons (from B\$500) and ceremonial swords (about B\$500), made by the centre's students and graduates, for much more than you'd pay in Sarawak or Kalimantan. Not bad for window-shopping, though – check out the *jong sarat* (hand-woven cloth made from gold and silver threads; B\$400 to B\$4000 for a 2m-long bolt). If you're serious about Bruneian artisanship, pick up the sultanate's *Directory of Handicraft Entrepreneurs* (B\$4.80). The centre is on the river 600m east of Sungai Kianggeh.

Paul & Elizabeth Book Services

BOOKS

(Map p458; ☎222-0958; 2nd fl, eastern bldg, Yayasan Complex, Jln Pretty; ☎9.30am-9pm) This place stocks a few books on Brunei, a street map of the entire sultanate and a small range of English-language paperbacks, including some ancient LP guides! There's also an internet cafe (p465).

Hua Ho Department Store

DEPARTMENT STORE

(Map p458; ☎10am-10pm) Don't miss four-level Hua Ho with its cache of traditional Bruneian sweets in the basement.

Tamu Kianggeh

CRAFT

(Map p458; Jln Sungai Kianggeh) Woven crafts are sold along the river here, but prices are higher than in Malaysia.

i Information

Emergency

Ambulance (☎991)

Fire Brigade (☎995)

Police (☎993)

Internet Access

Amin & Sayeed Cyber Cafe (1st fl, cnr Jln Sultan & Jln McArthur; per hr B\$1; ☎9am-midnight)

Paul & Elizabeth Cyber Cafe (2nd fl, eastern bldg, Yayasan Complex, Jln Pretty; per hr B\$1; ☎9am-9pm) Overlooks the central atrium in the eastern building of the Yayasan complex. Decent connections, bad soundtrack.

Medical Services

RIPAS Hospital (☎224 2424; www.moh.gov.bn/medhealthservices/ripas.htm; Jln Tutong; ☎24hr) Brunei's main hospital, with fully equipped, modern facilities. Most of the senior staff are Western trained. Situated about 2km west of the centre (across the Edinburgh Bridge).

Jerudong Park Medical Centre (☎emergency 261 2461, 261 1433; www.jpmmc.com.bn; Tutong-Muara Hwy; ☎24hr) Private medical facility; high standards of care. Located about 27km north-west of the BSB centre, accessible by bus 55.

Money

Banks and international ATMs are sprinkled around the city centre, especially along Jln McArthur and Jln Sultan. The airport has ATMs, and you can change travellers cheques at larger hotels.

HSBC (cnr Jln Sultan & Jln Pemancha; ☎8.45am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 11.30am Sat) Has a 24-hour ATM. You must have an HSBC account to change travellers cheques.

Isman Money Changer (ground fl, eastern bldg, Yayasan Complex, Jln Pretty; ☎9.30am-7.30pm) Changes cash but not travellers cheques. Just off the central atrium.

Post

Main Post Office (cnr Jln Sultan & Jln Elizabeth Dua; ☎8am-4.30pm Mon-Thu & Sat, 8-11am & 2-4pm Fri) Has a free internet computer. The Stamp Gallery displays some historic first-day covers and blow-ups of colonial-era stamps.

Tourist Information

Keep an eye out for the free **Borneo Insider's Guide** (BIG; www.borneoinsidersguide.com), a glossy magazine published four times a year.

For a mix of fresh news, business information and visitor tips about Brunei, check out www.brudirect.com.

Brunei Tourism (www.bruneitourism.travel), whose wonderful website has oodles of useful information, runs three tourist-information counters that can supply the only decent maps of the sultanate. One is at **Old Customs House**; one is in the arrival hall at the BSB Airport; and one at the Kampung Ayer Cultural & Tourism Gallery (p465), across the river from the city centre.

Airport (arrival hall; ☎8am-noon & 1.30-5pm)

Brunei Tourism (☎9am-5pm Sat-Thu, 9-11am & 2.30-5pm Fri) Across the river from the city centre.

i Getting There & Away

Air

Brunei International Airport (☎233 1747, flight enquiries 233 6767; www.civil-aviation.gov.bn) By the time you read this, flash new

GETTING TO SABAH: BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN TO BANDAR LABUAN

Getting to the border Travel by sea to Sabah is the easiest option, avoiding the hassles and delays of land borders – traffic at the Kuala Lurah crossing has been known to cause three-hour delays. Car ferries from Serasa Ferry Terminal in Muara, about 20km northeast of BSB, to the Malaysian federal territory of Pulau Labuan (1½ hours) are run by PKL Jaya Sendirian. If you've got a car, get there at least an hour before sailing.

PKL Jaya Sendirian also operates a car-ferry service from the Serasa Ferry Terminal to the Sabah port of Menumbok (2½ hours), which is 152km by road from Kota Kinabalu. Adult/car B\$35/90 from Muara, RM80/210 from Menumbok; departures at 10.30am from Muara, 4pm from Menumbok. A new ferry service on the Kimanis-1 boat was scheduled to begin three round-trip services between BSB and Menumbok via Labuan as of press time.

Three express buses a day (B\$3, 40 minutes) link BSB direct with the ferry; departures from BSB's bus terminal (from the berth for bus 39) are at 6.30am, 11.30am and 2.15pm. To go by public transport, you can take a more convoluted trip via bus 37, 38 or 39 to Muara town (B\$1 at least twice an hour); from there it's a short ride on bus 33 to the ferry.

At the border Most travellers to Malaysia are granted a 30 or 60 day visa on arrival.

Moving on From Bandar Labuan, daily ferries go to Kota Kinabalu (115km by sea).

See p378 for details on doing the trip in the opposite direction.

GETTING TO SARAWAK: BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN TO MIRI

Getting to the border **PHLS Express** (☎771 668) links BSB with Miri (B\$18 from BSB, RM40 from Miri, 3½ hours) via Seria and Kuala Belait (two hours) twice a day. Departures from BSB's PGGB building (on Jln Sungai Kianggeh just south of the Chinese Temple) are at approximately 7am and 1pm and from Miri's Pujut Bus Terminal at about 8am and 4pm. Tickets are sold on board. Travel between Miri and Seria or Kuala Belait costs B\$12 or RM25.

Another option for travel between BSB and Miri is a 'private transfer' (RM60 per person) in a **seven-seater van** (☎016-807 2893, in Malaysia 013-833 2331) run by a father-son team. Departures from BSB are usually at 1pm or 2pm; departures from Miri are generally at 9am or 10am but may be earlier. It may also be possible to hitch a ride (RM50 per person, 3½ hours) with a **newspaper-delivery van** (☎in BSB 876 0136, in Miri before 4pm 012-878 0136). Departure from Miri is at 5.30am; be prepared for an hour's delay at customs.

At the border Most travellers to Malaysia are granted a 30 or 60 day visa on arrival.

Moving on The bus will leave you at Miri's Pujut Bus Terminal, a 4km taxi ride from the city centre.

See p439 for details on doing the trip in the opposite direction.

renovations are supposed to turn this small airport into a modern international hub.

TEMBURONG DISTRICT

The fastest way to get to Bangar is by speedboat (adult/senior B\$6/5, 45 minutes, at least hourly from 6am to at least 4.30pm, until as late as 6pm on Sunday and holidays). The dock is on Jln Residency about 200m east of Sungai Kianggeh.

Bus & Van

BSB's carbon monoxide-choked bus terminal is on the ground floor of a multistorey parking complex two blocks north of the waterfront. It is used by domestic lines, including those to Muara, Seria, Tutong and Kuala Lurah, and services to Pontianak in Kalimantan, but not to Sabah or Sarawak. Schematic signs next to each numbered berth show the route of each line.

For details on various bus and van options to Malaysia, contact KH Soon Resthouse (p462) in BSB or Miri's Visitors Information Centre (p438).

i Getting Around To/From the Airport

The airport, about 8km north of central BSB, is linked to the city centre, including the bus terminal on Jln Cator, by buses 23, 24, 36 and 38.

A cab to/from the airport costs B\$25-35; taxis are unmetered, so agree on a price before you get in. Some hotels offer airport pick-up.

Bus

Brunei's public bus system, run by a variety of companies, is rather chaotic, at least to the uninitiated, so getting around by public transport takes effort. Buses (B\$1) operate daily from

6.30am to about 6.30pm (7pm on some lines); after that, your options are taking a cab or hoofing it. If you're heading out of town and will need to catch a bus back, ask the driver if and when they're coming back and when the last bus back is.

Finding stops can be a challenge – some are marked by black-and-white-striped uprights or a shelter, others by a yellow triangle painted on the pavement, and yet others by no discernible symbol. Fortunately, numbers are prominently displayed on each 20- or 40-passenger bus.

The bus station lacks an information office or a ticket counter, and while the schematic wall map may make sense to BSB natives, it's a bit of a cipher to the uninitiated. Some tourist brochures include a schematic route map.

Jesselton Express (☎012-622 9722, 717 7755, 719 3835, in BSB 718 3838, in KK 016-836 0009) sends a bus to KK (B\$45, eight to nine hours) via Limbang, Bangar, Lawas and various towns in Sabah daily at 8am. Make sure you have your passport ready if you're travelling overland to Sabah because you'll be stopping at a whopping eight checkpoints (thanks mainly to the outgrowth of Temburong District). As long as your ID is in order you'll be fine; the trip is tedious rather than dodgy.

Car

Brunei has Southeast Asia's cheapest petrol – gasoline is just B\$0.53 a litre and diesel goes for only B\$0.30! If you're driving a car (eg a rental) with Malaysian plates and are not a Brunei resident, you'll be taken to a special pump to pay more (this is to prevent smuggling).

Hiring a car is a good way to explore Brunei's hinterland. Prices start at about B\$80 a day. Surcharges may apply if the car is taken into Sarawak. Most agencies will bring the car to your hotel and

pick it up when you've finished, and drivers can also be arranged, though this could add B\$100 to the daily cost. The main roads are in good condition, but some back roads require a 4WD.

The following are among the rental companies (most of them local) with offices at the airport:

Avis (☎242- 6345, 876 0642; www.avis.com)

Hertz (☎245 2244, 872 6000; www.hertz.com)

Taxis

Taxis are a convenient way of exploring BSB – if you can find one, that is. There is no centralised taxi dispatcher and it's difficult or impossible to flag down a cab on the street. Hotels can provide drivers' cell-phone numbers. Most taxis have yellow tops; a few serving the airport are all white.

BSB's only proper taxi rank is two blocks north of the waterfront at the bus terminal on Jln Nator.

Some taxis use meters (\$B3 for the first kilometre, and \$B1 for every kilometre thereafter), although many drivers will just try to negotiate a fare with you. Fares go up by 50% after 10pm; the charge for an hour of wait time is B\$30 to B\$35. Sample day-time taxi fares from the city centre include the Brunei Museum (B\$10), Gadong (B\$15), the airport (B\$30), the Serasa Ferry Terminal in Muara (B\$35), the Empire Hotel & Country Club (B\$35) and the Jerudong Park Playground (B\$35 to B\$40).

Water Taxi

If your destination is near the river, water taxis – the same little motorboats that ferry people to and from Kampung Ayer – are a good way of getting there. You can hail a water taxi anywhere on the waterfront a boat can dock, as well as along Venice-themed Sungai Kianggeh. Crossing straight across the river is supposed to cost B\$0.50 per person; diagonal crossings cost more.

TUTONG & BELAIT DISTRICTS

Most travellers merely pass through the districts of Tutong and Belait, west of BSB, en route to Miri in Sarawak, but there are a few worthwhile attractions. Frequent buses link Kuala Belait, Seria and Tutong with BSB, but if you want to really see the sights the best way is to take a tour or rent a car.

Tutong

POP 20,000

About halfway between Seria and BSB, Tutong is the main town in central Brunei. The town itself is neat but unremarkable, but

the area is famous in Brunei for two things: pitcher plants and sand. Tutong has six species of pitcher plants and the locals cook a variety of dishes in their insect-catching sacs. Some of the sand near Tutong is so white that Bruneians will often take pictures with it while pretending it's snow (did we mention there's no booze here? Have your fun any way you can, Brunei). You can see *pasir putih* (white sand) in patches along the side of the Pan Borneo Hwy.

There's a great beach, **Pantai Seri Kenangan**, also known as Pantai Tutong, a couple of kilometres west of town, on Jln Kuala Tutong. Set on a spit of land, with the ocean on one side and the Sungai Tutong on the other, the casuarina-lined beach is arguably the best in Brunei. The royal family clearly agrees, as they have a surprisingly modest palace here for discreet getaways.

Getting There & Away

The buses that link BSB with Seria stop in Tutong (B\$3, one hour, every 30 to 60 minutes until 5pm).

Jalan Labi

A few kilometres after you enter Belait District (coming from Tutong and BSB), a road branches inland (south) to Labi and beyond, taking you through some prime forest areas. The easiest way into the interior of western Brunei, Jln Labi offers a chance to stop by Brunei's **Forestry Museum** (☎8am-12:15pm & 1:30am-4:30pm, closed Fri & Sun) and see a number of Iban longhouses, which in these parts come complete with mod cons and parking lots.

About 40km south of the coastal road, Labi is a small Iban settlement with some fruit arbours. Further south, you come to the Iban longhouses of **Rampayoh**, **Mendaram Besar**, **Mendaram Kecil** and finally, at the end of the track, **Teraja**, where a local guide may be able to take you to a nearby waterfall.

Seria

POP 34,000

Spread out along the coast between Tutong and Kuala Belait, low-density Seria is home to many of Brunei Shell's major onshore installations. A Ghurkha infantry battalion of the British Army is stationed here, the UK's last remaining military base in eastern Asia. A big market is held on Friday until about 3pm.

Sights

Oil & Gas Discovery Centre

MUSEUM

(☎337 7200; www.bsp.com.bn/ogdc; off Jln Tengah; adult/teenager/senior B\$5/2/3; ☎8:30am-5pm Mon-Sat, 9:30am-6pm Sun) Puts an 'edutainment' spin on the oil industry. Likely to appeal to young science buffs and Shell employees. About 700m northwest of the bus station.

Billionth Barrel Monument

MONUMENT

Commemorates (you guessed it) the billionth barrel of crude oil produced at the Seria field, a landmark reached in 1991. We really were hoping this monument would look like an actual oil barrel because, well, that'd be hilarious, but it's more like a bunch of blue noodles topped by the emblem of the sultanate. Which, come to think of it, is cool too. Out to sea, oil rigs producing the sultanate's second billion dot the horizon. Situated on the beach about 1km west of the Oil & Gas Discovery Centre.

Sleeping

Hotel Koperas

HOTEL \$\$

(☎322 7586, 322 7589, 322 7592; hotel_seria@brunet.bn; Jln Sharif Ali; s/d B\$72/88; 🏠🚗) Seria's only proper hotel, with 24 neat, if boring, rooms. Situated 150m northwest of the bus station.

Getting There & Away

Frequent buses go southwest to Kuala Belait (B\$1, three times an hour from 6.30am to 6.15pm) and northeast to BSB (B\$6, 2½ hours, every 30 to 60 minutes until about 5pm) via Tutong.

Kuala Belait

POP 35,500

Almost on the Sarawak frontier, coastal Kuala Belait (KB) is a modern, sprawling company town – the company being Brunei Shell – of one-storey suburban villas interspersed with grasshopper-like pump jacks. Although there's a reasonable beach, most travellers just hustle through on their way to or from Miri.

Sleeping & Eating

In the town centre, restaurants can be found along Jln McKerron and, two short blocks east, on parallel Jln Pretty, KB's main commercial avenue. Locals recommend the roast duck.

Hotel Sentosa

HOTEL \$\$

(☎333 1345; www.bruneisentosahotel.com; 92-93 Jln McKerron; s/d B\$98/103; 🏠🚗) Clean, well-run, tourist-class accommodation right in the centre of town. Situated one block south of the bus station.

Information

HSBC Bank (cnr Jln McKerron & Jln Dato Shahbandar) Has an international ATM. Situated diagonally opposite the bus station.

Getting There & Away

The **bus station** (cnr Jlns McKerron & Dato Shahbandar) is smack in the town centre. **Miri Belait** (☎419 129) runs five daily buses to Miri (B\$8/RM8), and PHLS Express (p466) (☎771 668) runs two more comfortable daily trips for similar prices. Purple minibuses go to Seria (B\$1) three times an hour from 6.30am to 6.15pm.

TEMBURONG DISTRICT

This odd little exclave (that means a part of a country physically separated from the rest of the nation; feel free to take that to the next pub quiz night) is barely larger than Penang, but happens to contain one of the best preserved tracts of primary rainforest in all of Borneo. The main draw is the brilliant Ulu Temburong National Park, accessible only by longboat.

The speedboat ride from BSB out to Bangar, the district capital, is the most fun you can possibly have for B\$6. You roar down Sungai Brunei, slap through the nipah-lined waterways and then tilt and weave through mangroves into the mouth of Sungai Temburong.

Want to get depressed? Go to Google Earth and look at the outline of Temburong District. It's easy to spot: at the Brunei frontier, Malaysia's logging roads – irregular gashes of eroded earth – and trashed hill-sides give way to a smooth carpet of trackless, uninhabited virgin rainforest. Until not long ago, almost all of Borneo looked like this.


Bangar

Little Bangar, perched on the banks of Sungai Temburong, is the gateway to, and administrative centre of, Temburong District. It can be visited as a day trip from BSB if you

catch an early speedboat, but you'll get more out of the town's easygoing pace if you stay over and explore the area, which has some fine primary rainforest and nine longhouses, not all of them very long.

Sleeping

Temburong District has a number of home stays used mainly by tour operators and locals with cars. In addition to the options listed below, there are also five or six guesthouses scattered around town. They're all acceptably clean and comfortable and otherwise nondescript.

Lukat Intan Guesthouse GUESTHOUSE \$\$
(☎864 3766, 522 1078; lukutintan@hotmail.com; B\$30-50; ) Run by a friendly older couple, Lukat offers spic and span rooms and personable service; you get breakfast with your stay and they're happy to give you free rides to the Bangar jetty.

Rumah Persinggahan Kerajaan Daerah Temburong GUESTHOUSE \$

(☎522 1239; Jln Batang Duri; s/d/tr/q B\$25/30/40/50, 4-person chalets B\$80; ) Set around a grassy, L-shaped courtyard, this government-run guesthouse has friendly, helpful staff and six spacious but slightly fraying rooms with rather more bathtub rust and somewhat cooler hot water than many would deem ideal. Situated a few hundred metres west of the town centre, across the highway from the two mosques.

Youth Hostel HOSTEL \$
(Pusat Belia; ☎522 1694; www.bruneiyouth.org.bn; dm B\$10; ☎office staffed 7.30am-4.30pm, closed Fri & Sat) Part of a youth centre, this basic hostel sits in a fenced compound across the street from (west of) the Tourist Information Centre. Rooms, each with six beds (bunks), are clean and fan-cooled. If no one's around try phoning or looking helplessly at passers by – worked for us.

Eating

The **fruit and veggie market**, behind the row of shops next to the Tourist Information Centre, has an upstairs **food court** (☎7am-10pm).

A handful of restaurants serving passable Malay and Chinese food can be found around the market, along and just in from the riverfront.

Information

3 in 1 Services (per hr B\$1; ☎7.45am-9.30pm, closed Sun) Internet access on the first floor of the building next to the market (across the pedestrian bridge from the hawker centre). The shop number is A1-3.

Bank Islam Brunei Darussalam (☎8.45am-3.45pm Mon-Thu, 8.45-11am & 2.30-4pm Fri, 8.45-11.15am Sat) The only bank in town. Changes US dollars and pounds sterling but not Malaysian ringgits. The ATM did not take international cards at time of research, but staff said this may change soon. On the river 150m north of the bridge.

Hock Guan Minimarket Exchanges Malaysian ringgits for Brunei dollars. In the second row of shops from the Tourist Information Centre.

Jayamuhibah Shopping Mart Carries some over-the-counter medicines (Temburong District does not have a proper pharmacy). In the second row of shops from the Tourist Information Centre.

Getting There & Away

Boat

By far the fastest way to/from BSB is by speedboat (adult/senior B\$6/5, 45 minutes, at least hourly from 6am to at least 4.30pm, until as late as 6pm on Sunday and holidays). Bangar's **ferry terminal**, Terminal Perahu Dan Penumpang, is on the western bank of the river just south of the red bridge.

Boats depart at a scheduled time or when they're full, whichever comes first. When you get to the ticket counters, check which company's boat will be the next to leave and then pay and add your name to the passenger manifest. Peak-hour departures can be as frequent as every 15 minutes.

Bus

Buses run by **Jesselton** (☎719 3835, 717 7755, in BSB 718 3838) pick up passengers heading towards Limbang and BSB in the early afternoon; its bus to KK (B\$25) and Lawas (B\$10) passes through town at about 10am.

Taxi

Bangar doesn't have official taxis, but it's usually not too difficult to hire a car if you ask around under the rain awning in front of the ferry terminal. Drivers may not speak much English. Possible destinations include the Malaysian border towards Limbang (B\$6), a distance of 4km; the town of Limbang (about B\$40) and the Peradayan Forest Reserve (Bukit Patoi; about B\$25 return).

Taxis do not wait on the Malaysian side of the border towards Limbang.

Pulau Selirong

At the northern tip of Temburong District, this 25-sq-km island is a sanctuary for mangroves and the fauna that live in them, including proboscis monkeys. The only way to visit is with a boat tour, which BSB tour operators can organise for around B\$75. The trip across the open water of Brunei Bay takes about 45 minutes.

Batang Duri

Batang Duri, about 16km south of Bangar, is the jumping-off point for longboat rides to Ulu Temburong National Park. As you head south, the sealed road passes Malay settlements, then Murut (Lun Bawang) hamlets and finally a few partly modern Iban longhouses.

Sleeping

 **Sumbiling Eco Village**

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(☎242 6923, 876 6796; borneoguide.com/eco village; per person incl meals B\$50; 📞) If you're looking for Brunei's version of a jungle camp with basic amenities and a chilled-out atmosphere that encourages slipping into a green state of utterly relaxed Zen, come to Sumbiling. This ecofriendly rustic camp offers great Iban cuisine (served on simpur leaves) and plenty of outdoor activities, including visits to nearby Ulu Temburong National Park, jungle overnights, inner-tubing and a forest trek. The basic rooms have glassless windows and a fan attached to the ceiling to make sure air circulates inside the mozzie nets (nice touch). Also has a rain-protected camping area, organic composting and importantly, no handouts of single-use plastic bottles. Nearby is a five-door Iban longhouse with fierce, beautiful fighting cocks – each family's prized possessions – tethered outside. Prices do not include transport. Run by Borneo Guide (p460) in cooperation with the local community. Situated a few minutes downstream from Batang Duri.

Peradayan Forest Reserve

If you can't be bothered with the logistics or expense of a trip up to Ulu Temburong National Park, the Peradayan Forest Reserve is a good day-trip alternative. There's a 5km

(one-way) trek up to the jungle-cloaked peak of **Bukit Patoi** (310m); it may also be possible to continue on to **Bukit Peradayan** (410m). The trail, through pristine jungle, begins at the picnic tables and toilet block of **Taman Rekreasi Bukit Patoi** (Bukit Patoi Recreational Park), about 15km southeast of Bangar (towards Lawas). Bring lots of water and be prepared to turn back if the path, not always properly maintained along its entire length, becomes too overgrown to follow.

If you don't have your own transport, you can get here from Bangar by unofficial taxi (about B\$30 return).

Ulu Temburong National Park

It's odd that in a country as manicured and regulated as Brunei, there's still a sizable chunk of true untamed wilderness. Therein lays the appeal of **Ulu Temburong National Park** (admission B\$5), located in the heart of a 500-sq-km area of pristine rainforest covering most of southern Temburong. It's so untouched that only about 1 sq km of the park is accessible to tourists, who are only admitted as part of guided tour packages. To protect it for future generations, the rest is off-limits to everyone except scientists, who flock here from around the world. Permitted activities include a canopy walk, some short jungle walks, and swimming in the cool mountain waters of Sungai Temburong – so don't forget your swimsuit.

The forests of Ulu Temburong are teeming with life, including as many as 400 kinds of butterfly, but don't count on seeing many vertebrates. The best times to spot birds and animals, in the rainforest and along river banks, are around sunrise and sunset, but you're much more likely to hear hornbills and Bornean gibbons than to see them.

Activities

Longboat Trip

BOAT TOUR

One of the charms of Ulu Temburong National Park is that the only way to get there is by *temuai* (shallow-draft Iban longboat). The exhilarating trip, which takes 25 to 40 minutes from Batang Duri, is tough on the boats, which last just a few years, and challenging even for experienced skippers, who need a variety of skills to shoot the rapids – going upstream – in a manner reminiscent of a salmon: submerged boulders and logs

DIRECTORY A–Z

» **Currency** Brunei dollar (B\$)

» **Eating price categories**

\$ less than B\$6

\$\$ B\$6–16

\$\$\$ more than B\$16

» **Emergency phone numbers**

Ambulance ☎991

Police ☎993

Fire ☎995

Search & Rescue ☎998

Directory enquiries ☎113

» **Public holidays** Brunei shares major public holidays with Malaysia. Holidays specific to Brunei include Brunei National Day (23 February), Royal Brunei Armed Forces Day (31 May) and the Sultan of Brunei's Birthday (15 July).

» **Tourist information** Brunei Tourism (www.bruneitourism.travel) is a very useful website, containing information on transport, business hours, accommodation, tour agencies and more.

» **Sleeping price categories**

\$ less than B\$60

\$\$ B\$60–150

\$\$\$ more than B\$150

» **Visas** US travellers are granted a free 90 day visa on arrival; travellers from Western Europe, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia, among others, receive a free 30 day visa; Swiss, Japanese and Canadians get 14 free days. Australians can apply for a visa upon arrival: a three-day transit visa (B\$5), a two-week single-entry visa (B\$20) or a month-long multiple-entry visa (B\$30). Israeli travellers are banned from entering Brunei.

For more information about your own country's visa policy see Immigration Brunei (www.immigration.gov.bn/002/html/melawat.html).

» **Cultural & legal matters** Brunei is a strictly Islamic country, with more restrictions and regulations than Malaysia and Singapore. Travellers would do well to keep the following cultural elements in mind:

» **Drugs & alcohol** The sale and public consumption of alcohol is forbidden in Brunei. That said, people do drink, but it tends to occur either in private residences or the back rooms of Chinese restaurants. Drug trafficking is punishable by the death penalty.

» **Homosexuality** According to www.smarttraveller.gov.au, 'consensual homosexual acts between adults (of either sex) are illegal and penalties include prison sentences'.

» **Smoking** Brunei's tough anti-smoking laws ban puffing not only inside shops and malls but also in outdoor markets and around food stalls.

» **Women travellers** Discreet clothing is appropriate here – you certainly don't have to cover your hair, but walking around in a tank top or bikini top is a bad idea. Be mindful, too, that some women have reported being the object of catcalls and come-ons, especially from passing motorists.

have to be dodged, hanging vines must be evaded and the outboard must be taken out of the water at exactly the right moment. When it rains, the water level can quickly rise by up to 2m, but if the river is low you might have to get out and push.

Aluminium Walkway

CANOPY WALK

The park's main attraction is a delicate aluminium walkway, secured by guy-wires, that takes you through (or, more accurately, near) the jungle canopy, up to 60m above the forest floor. In primary rainforests, only

limited vegetation can grow on the ground because so little light penetrates, but up in the canopy all manner of life proliferates. Unfortunately, there are no explanatory signs here and some guides don't have the background to explain the importance of the canopy ecosystem and point out the huge variety of organisms that can live on a single tree: orchids, bird's-nest ferns and other epiphytes; ants and myriad other insects; amphibians and snakes; and a huge selection of birds.

The views of nearby hills and valleys from the walkway are breathtaking, if you can get over the vertigo – the tower, built by Shell using oil-rig scaffolding technology, wobbles in the wind. Whatever you do, don't think of metal fatigue or lightning. If you'd like to share the experience with friends or loved ones back home and have a Malaysian cell phone, the tops of the towers are a good place to catch a cross-border signal.

The trail up to the canopy walk begins near the confluence of Sungai Belalong and Temburong. It's a short, steep, sweaty walk. If you stay overnight at the resort, you can do the canopy walk at sunrise, when birds and animals are most likely to be around.

Rivers & Waterfalls

SWIMMING

Places to take a refreshing dip in the park's pure mountain waters include several rivers and waterfalls – your guide can point out the best spots.

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At one small waterfall, just outside the boundaries of the national park, you can stand in a pool, and 2cm- to 4cm-long fish that look like tiny sharks will come up and nibble your feet, giving you a gentle, ticklish pedicure as they feast on the dry skin between your toes. To get there, head downriver from the Ulu-Ulu resort for about 500m – your guide can help find the creek you need to follow upstream for a few hundred metres.



Sleeping



Ulu-Ulu Resort

LODGE \$\$\$

(www.ululuresort.com; per person from B\$290;

*) In Malay, *ulu* (as in Ulu Temburong) means 'upriver' and *ulu-ulu* means, essentially, 'back of beyond'. The park's only accommodation is an upscale riverside lodge, built entirely of hardwood, with some rooms thoughtfully built in the style of 1920s Malaysian-style chalets. It has a cinema for rainy evenings – after the canopy walk, Hitchcock's *Vertigo* might be an excellent choice. Prices include transport from BSB and board; activities tend to be expensive.



Getting There & Away

For all intents and purposes, the only way to visit the park is by booking a tour; several BSB-based agencies (p460) organise tour groups and guides.

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